DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 385 145 FL 023 143

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TITLE Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages. Multilingual Matters Series: 76.
REPORT NO ISBN-1-85359-121-1
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 440p.
AVAILABLE FROM Multilingual Matters Ltd., 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007 (ISBN-1-85359-122-X, hardback; ISBN-1-85359-121-1, paperback).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Books (010)

EDRS PRICE Document Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS American Indian Languages; Basque; Case Studies; Diachronic Linguistics; Foreign Countries; French; Hebrew; Indigenous Populations; Irish; *Language Maintenance; *Language Planning; Language Research; *Language Role; Linguistic Theory; Spanish; Uncommonly Taught Languages; Yiddish
IDENTIFIERS Australia; *Frisian; New Zealand; Quebec; United States

ABSTRACT

The theory and practice of assistance to speech communities whose native languages are threatened are examined. The discussion focuses on why most efforts to reverse language shift are unsuccessful or even harmful, diagnosing difficulties and prescribing alternatives based on a combination of ethnolinguistic, sociocultural, and econotechnical considerations. The first section looks at reasons for trying to reverse language shift, whether it is possible, where and why shift occurs, and how it can be reversed. A typology of disadvantaged languages and ameliorative priorities is presented. The second section contains a number of case studies from different continents, including those of: Irish; Basque; Frisian; Navajo, Spanish, and Yiddish (secular and ultra-orthodox) in America; Maori in New Zealand; Australian aboriginal and immigrant languages, Modern Hebrew and French in Quebec; Catalan in Spain; and the unique situation of non-transmission of "additional" (parents' second) languages. The third section addresses the related issues of language planning for reversal of language shift, dialect standards and corpus planning, intergenerational transmission of "additional" languages, and limitations on school effectiveness in connection with native language transmission. Chapters include bibliographies. (MSE)

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